

HAUNTED LONDON.

THE GHOST OF SAMUEL JOHNSON.

THERE is no ghost, among all the ghosts haunting London, that we oftener meet at night, just by the black mud-splashed arch of Temple Bar, than old Samuel Johnson's.

When the sooty orifice that cabs and omnibuses are all day threading, is visited at the small hours by lurid glimpses of the Fleet-street moon; when St. Clement's clock is striking, we will not say what, and white as snow shines the pointing hand of James the First from his niche above the ebon gateway; and when the prim, fish-headed statue of Queen Elizabeth on the Temple side, is dark in shadow as a female mute; then I meet my burly ghost with the little shrivelled scorched wig and the inked ruffles. Then, when the moon shows her silver disk, and the glass windows of the upper room where Messrs. Child keep their banking ledgers, look dim, semi-transparent, and solemn as the windows of some mortuary chapel, the sturdy ghost rolls through to revisit his old haunts.

I will follow the great lexicographer in the knee-breeches and deep flapper waistcoat, to all his old Strand lodgings and old club haunts, whether up silent courts, where your football sounds loud in the silence, or into sawdust-strewn taverns, where the portraits of extinct waiters are over the mantelpiece, and the cry is "Stale or household?" "Old or mild, sir?" "One chop and follow!" and other still more abbreviated inquiries and signals. Or, we shall trace him up the black common stair of chambers to the double door and the room strewn with books, paper, and crushed quills—rooms with smoked ceilings and wainscoted walls, long since passed into air? Nor must we forget to walk round St. James's-square, as he and that vagabond poet, Savage, once did all night for lack of a lodging.

It becomes me at this season, to think how that John Bushnell, the architect who carried out Wren's design and built this gateway, has been gone to dust exactly one hundred and fifty-eight years, and as I muse over the not uncommon lot of John Bushnell, who built a gateway, who died and was forgotten, I follow the burly ghost of the son of the poor Lichfield bookseller that just now rolled through, as he was wont years ago at such hours, returning from his club in some of the side streets of the Strand, to his lonely lodgings in the Temple or Bolt-court, thinking of Boswell, and of Reynolds the painter's ear-trumpet, of Burke the orator's spectacles, or Gibbon the historian's snuff-box, and of some of his own solemn sledge-hammer repartees, beginning, "Why, sir?" or "No, sir," or "What then, sir," with which he had felled his conversational antagonists. I am so near the ghost that I can see his dirty large hands, bitten nails, scrofula-

scarred face, brown coat, black worsted stockings, and breeches loose at the knees. Perhaps, with rolling eyes and convulsively twitching mouth, he is repeating to himself those solemn lines of his poem on London, which he had founded on such bitter experience :

This mournful truth is everywhere confessed,
Slow rises worth by poverty depressed ;

or he is, with sarcastic smile, chewing the cud of that cruel definition in his Dictionary, so inhuman when we consider his young Scotch friend Boswell's feelings :

OATS, a grain that the English feed their horses with, and the Scotch their men.

Thanks, I say loudly, to that self-immolating biographer of the doctor's, Boswell, that "dunce, parasite, and coxcomb," as one of his commentators calls him ; that standing Scotch bore who was laughed at in St. James's-street, sneered at in the Temple, and despised everywhere ; who kept for years like a spaniel, or a toadying poor relation, at the elbow of the great doctor ; who submitted patiently to hurricanes of laughter, hailstorms of sarcasm, and pelting rains of insolence, so that he could keep his note-book open and take down the aphorisms of the great club lawgiver he idolised, and whose fame he hoped to share, however humbly ! Thanks, I say, to this industrious, intellectual serf, this unpaid helot, we know the minutest virtues and weaknesses of the ponderous doctor, who has left such clear foot-prints of his on these oblong London stones.

As we follow that ghost about his London haunts we feel, as we watch his broad back, that we know almost more about him than we do about our own father ; we know that in Bolt-court, number eight, on the right hand, opposite the Bolt-in-Tun, is where he lived for seven years, where his ghost most delights to haunt. There he kept his cat Hodge, who put up his back and purred much like other cats, and whom he was anxious should not be shot. There, on the ground-floor, lived his pensioner, blind Mrs. Williams, who used to tell if the tea-cups were full enough by sounding them with her snuffy, shrivelled fingers : much to the horror of Miss Reynolds and Mrs. Piozzi, the shrewd brewer's widow, who shocked everybody by marrying an Italian master. Here was the little garden that the great author of *Rasselas* loved to watch and nurture ; and here were two floors piled with his books, and only a way in one place for his study, where he could fret, and think, and brood, and storm as he liked. Here, within reach of the pleasant friendly roar of Fleet-street, that he loved, then waited on by his negro servant Frank Barber, and the old, decayed, taciturn surgeon Mr. Levett, used to sit the lawgiver of the club, hoarding up mysterious scraps of orange-peel, eating veal-pie and plums, till perspiration dropped from his forehead ; sleeping late and then repenting it ; praying, resolving, twitching, grunting, shaking his head, puffing, blink-

ing, teasing Goldsmith and snubbing Boswell ; in a word, turning out down the court, wig hind before and stockings down, amid the clamour of boys and wonder of chairmen, to hand Mrs. Montague or bewitching Miss Burney to her carriage. Here it was, too—in this quiet harbour of a court, where we put, as into a haven, from the cataract of coaches in Fleet-street, their thunder and tearing trample ; in the back room of the first floor of the now vanished house—that the doctor surrendered his poor soul to Him who gave it. Here, to this quiet Bolt-court came the great Burke and Langton, and all the club, to bid farewell to the dying man, to shake his pale hand ; and here Reynolds promised him that he would read the Bible, and never paint any more on Sundays. Here, in the vanished house, he said, in his grand, unchangeable manner, to the preternaturally solemn doctor, who felt his purse and shook his head, "No, sir, I am not better ; you cannot conceive with what acceleration I advance towards death." Here, as he opened his last note, he said, "We shall receive no letters in the grave." Here, he was glad to know he would be buried in the Abbey ; here, on Monday, the 13th of December, at seven o'clock in the evening, he passed away so softly, that the watchers in his room did not know he had left them for another world. Here, was with him no departing wrestle for life, no agonising struggle and clinging to the sharp edge of the grave. And let us, before we leave Bolt-court and push off for another haunt of the great Lichfield man's, excrete the memory of that ruthless printer who pulled down the house where Johnson died, erecting another, which, by a just retribution, was eaten up indignantly, by fire, one November night in 1807.

There is scarcely one of the streets leading from the Strand down to the river—which, with rusted railings at the ends of them, and ghostly glimpses, at dusk, of giant shot-towers and bridges of lamps—has not some memory of Johnson, or has not echoed with his heavy tread. In quiet John-street, Adelphi, in the Society of Arts, for instance, and the council-room hung round with the great allegorical pictures by that wonderful, mad, quarrelsome, Irish painter, Barry, painted by him for nothing, at a time he was all but starving—there, amongst naked Grecian striplings, nymphs, Dr. Burney in his wig, Captain Cook, and Raleigh, is the doctor's portrait. He sat for it ; and here you may detect, among gods and goddesses, his purblind eyes, querulous mouth, elevated eyebrows, and square, lined forehead. Here he enunciated his tremendous abhorrence of Whig, Scotchman, and foreigner. Here, in the green-room, Goldsmith once got up to address the learned Society, and, after floundering, blundering, and stammering, sat down in vexed confusion ; and here Johnson spoke once on some subject relative to mechanics, with all the clearness and vigour for which he was renowned.

Let us push on for Bedford-street. It was when living in this street, at a house opposite

Henrietta-street, that the great doctor used to visit the father of the great orator Sheridan, the Irish oratorical lecturer. It was at a drawing-room window of this house that Sheridan—the man whom Johnson despised and Foote ridiculed—and a friend, stood one afternoon, with an opera-glass, watching for the learned doctor, who was expected to dinner. Presently he loomed through the grey blue of the London distance, large, cumbersome, and Cyclopean, and they “made him out,” as the sailors call it, working along with a solemn deportment, and an awkward, measured step. There was at that time no side pavement of level broad flags, but there were stone posts at intervals, to guard foot-passengers from carriages. Upon every post the two friends in the window—dull, fluent Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Whyte the short-sighted—saw the doctor lay his hand; and if he missed one, he would go on a trifle, then stop, and seem to recollect and be troubled, and go back, to complete the ceremony. This strange, morbid, hypochondriac ceremonial was one Mr. Sheridan said the doctor, in that street at least, always performed.

We will follow the great lexicographer's ghost to Bow-street, where the doctor once lived for a short time; where all the great actors and authors had lived when the place was fashionable, and before that terrible, black, hearse-like prisoners' van appeared there daily like a spectre's coach. This was in his rough days, when he was drudging for Cave, the editor of the Gentleman's Magazine, tramping out perpetually to St. John's Gate, in Clerkenwell, to see him, and dine there behind a screen, that hid his shabbiness from Cave's tradesmen guests. Now, as we walk up Oxford-street, escaping with difficulty at Regent-circus being trampled to death by Lord Peabody's silver-plated greys, watching the Lady Smalltalk getting out at the fashionable bonnet-shop, where the windows are a perfect flower-bed of spring ribbons, it is hard to recal the simple days when Johnson brought here his wife Zetty, from Lichfield: the fat, red-cheeked, affected woman whom Garrick used to mimic.

No reasonable ghost doing it quietly could visit all Johnson's haunts in one night, between sunset and cock-crow. For instance, now breaking erratically down from Oxford Market, and omitting many Johnson-haunted spots, I must get again into Johnson's favourite river street, the Strand, and go to Exeter-street, where, in a lofty garret at the house of a certain Norris, and staymaker, he lodged when he first came to town. He had left the fair widow he had married in Lichfield—had given up his detested school where the merciless boys used to watch and laugh at him through key-holes, and had come up to London with his pupil Garrick, who loved, ridiculed, and feared him—to push his fortune as a writer. Here, then, in this Venetian street, looking out on the water, glittering under the sun and leaden under the shadow, lived the straggler; remarkable at the eightpenny ordinary at the Pine Apple in New-street where he dined, for

his gaunt, lank form and scarred twitching face; but more for his learning and conversational powers, his sledge-hammer answers and pistol-shot repartees. For some time he lived on fourpence-halfpenny a day, and paid visits on clean-shirt days only. He abstained from wine, and waited bravely for sunshine; though a bookseller, looking at his broad shoulders, did tell him that he had better buy a porter's knot. He met “very good company” at the Pine Apple, in New-street, Covent Garden; for, though no one knew his neighbour's name, some had travelled. “It used to cost the rest,” the doctor related, proudly, in after life at great tables, Boswell waiting at his elbow with his greedy note-book, and Reynolds ready with his receptive ear-trumpet and watchful glittering spectacles—“it used to cost the rest a shilling, for they drank wine; but I had a cut of meat for sixpence, and bread for a penny, and gave the waiter a penny, so that I was quite well served: nay, better than the rest, for they gave the waiter nothing.” Part of that ponderous tragedy, Irene, which led him a year afterwards to frequent the green-room in a suit of scarlet and gold lace of extraordinary splendour, was written in this healthy garret, in the street where Exeter House once stood; where Earl Cecil, son of the celebrated Burleigh, who once nodded his head to some effect, lived; and when the street was ever rustling with satin, and there was perpetual grinding by of gilded coaches, and putting off of silken-canopied boats to Elizabeth's palaces, right or left, of Greenwich and Whitehall.

But, we must go nearer the black dome, to another river-side garret of the great man's, and see him with his scorched wig (for he was short-sighted, and was always singeing it by reading with a candle held too close), in Gough-square, Fleet-street. Here in the Dictionary time—in a sort of rude counting-house, with his five Scotch and one English secretaries and copyists—he boasted that he (one Englishman) was doing what it had taken forty French Academicians to do.

It was at this time that the great doctor organised a club in Ivy-lane, Newgate-street, every Tuesday evening, at the King's Head Beef-steak House: a club which he tried to re-organise the year before his death, till he found to his regret that the landlord was dead and the house shut up. The members were merchants, booksellers, physicians, and dissenting ministers. Here, while the steak bubbled, or the chop hissed, spat, and flared, Johnson beat down his adversaries with his conversational club, talking more for victory than truth: now, denying that a country's luxury increased with its riches: now, that card-playing was an increasing vice: now, asserting that good, and now that evil, predominated in the world.

He, of all great men, was a tavern haunter, as Dryden had been, and as Addison had been. He used to praise the civility of the waiters, the beaming welcome of the landlord, the promptness of the attendance, the readiness of the company to be pleased. “Here, sir,” he said, “I dogmatise

and am contradicted, and I love this conflict of intellect and opinion."

It was in that airy haunt in Gough-street that Johnson, waited on by the poor Dominie Sampson of a doctor whom he pensioned, used to hold his morning levees of all sorts of incongruous people—kind gentle Mr. Langton, the young dissipated beau who decoyed the doctor into Covent-garden revels; Garrick, the actor; Dodsley, the printer, once a footman; Strahan, the printer; Mrs. Gardiner, the wife of a tallow-chandler on Snow-hill; and Mr. Diamond, an apothecary of Cork-street, with whom he had planned an expedition to Ireland that never took place.

Here, to this famous and honoured garret came those friends of the club, till one settled here, and another there; till one died, and another went abroad, and Ivy-lane no longer echoed with the stentorian wisdom of that voice. It must have been affecting—that gathering of the survivors of the old club—years afterwards at the Queen's Arms, St. Paul's-churchyard, one December afternoon at half-past three: The old doctor himself wrote about it to tripping Mrs. Thrale, and said pathetically enough, "We had not met together for thirty years, and one of us thought the others grown very old. Our meeting may be supposed to be somewhat tender." They had coffee after dinner, and broke-up at ten. In another letter he says of the survivors of that dinner, "We were as cheerful as ever, but he could not make quite so much noise, for since the paralysis his voice had been sometimes weak." They must have been "clubbable" men, those survivors, to enjoy that thoughtful evening, the anniversary of thirty years' buried joys, affections, and hopes.

Another of the doctor's clubs was in one of his favourite river-side streets, Essex-street, at the Essex Head, now number forty, where, in 1783, the kind doctor established a club for the benefit of "Sam Greaves," an old servant of his friend Mr. Thrale. They met three times a week: "the terms low, the expenses light," said the doctor. He who misses forfeits twopence. Each man was president in turn, and the waiter's fee was a penny. Barry was a member, but Sir Joshua Reynolds was afraid of Barry, and would not join. Boszy was there, note-taking as usual.

All these clubs, whether in Essex-street, Strand, or Old-street, St. Luke's; whether they were formed of mathematical tailors or young physicians; fade away before the club—Johnson's special haunt—THE CLUB held at the Turk's Head in Gerrard-street, Soho, and founded, in 1764, in the street where Dryden had once lived, and where James the First's unlucky son Prince Henry, built a house. It was started by the great painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, originally consisted of ten members, and met every Friday at seven for supper. Here, Sir John Hawkins, that wrong-headed member, quarrelled with Burke; here, Goldsmith tried to elbow in his jokes; and here Reynolds shifted his ear-trumpet and took snuff. Here, comes Johnson

from his room in Johnson's-court, or from his bottle of port and talk about the Hebrides with Boswell at the Mitre, in Fleet-street. It was to this club that Boswell, who had been fidgeting all the evening while talking to Lady Dr. Bennet for fear he should be rejected, was taken; and to the Turk's Head, where Johnson, leaning over a chair as if he was leaning from a pulpit, delivered him a mock charge as to his duties as a good fellow and a clubbable man. Here the doctor enunciated all his prejudices, his hatred of furious Frenchmen, Scotchmen, Whigs, Dissenters, Fielding's novels, and his love of city life, tavern, club, good haters. Here he preached and thundered, teased Garrick, and confuted Gibbon, lamented Goldsmith's death, and railed at Wilkes, the despot and autocrat on Friday nights.

But, one of the greatest haunts of Johnson was the Mitre Tavern, in Fleet-street. He seems, in 1763, when Boswell knew him, to have been perpetually there. "When I go up that quiet cloistered court, running up like a little secure haven from the stormy ocean of Fleet-street, and see the doctor's gnarled bust on the bracket above his old hat, I sometimes think the very waistcoat must still be impregnated by the fumes of his seething punch-bowls." At this time the doctor used to leave his chambers in Inner Temple-lane, lately pulled down, at four in the afternoon, and never go home again till two in the morning, afraid of solitude and the blue-devils that lurked in those old Temple rooms waiting his return. The first meeting of Boswell and Johnson in that low-roofed mouldy hostelry was arranged by Boszy, who had heard that the Mitre was a place of frequent resort with the doctor, who used to sit there late. Boswell, a young man about town, wishing to get into the Foot Guards, but determining, at his crabbed shrewd old father's wish, to go to Utrecht and study law, wanted Johnson's advice about a course of study, and, having been introduced to him at Davies the bookseller's, called upon the doctor at his request, and proposed his coming at this very Mitre, with its curtained partitions and incomplete daylight. A few days later, Boszy meets the great doctor going home to Inner Temple-lane at one in the morning. Ever impudent and unabashed, he at once proposes the Mitre; but "No, sir," said Johnson, kindly enough, "it is too late. They won't let us in. But I'll go with you another night with all my heart."

A week afterwards, Boszy, somewhat oblivious of the doctor, meets him in an eating-house in the Strand, the right-hand side above Temple-bar, and hears an Irishman quarrel with him as to the cause of some men being black. He follows him out, and agrees to come for Johnson that evening at nine. At nine they meet, go to the Mitre and sup, the doctor emptying his bottle of port. That night was the gem of Boswell's life: for, that night, Johnson took his admirer's hand, and, pleased with his frankness and veneration, said, "Sir, give me your hand, I have taken a liking to

you." One cannot but smile now, in that doleful, silent tavern, where no pots rattle, or busy waiters scream down kitchen speaking-tubes, to think of the almost deifying reverence with which that clever simpleton Boswell speaks of it. He says: "The orthodox high church sound of the MITRE, the figure and manner of the celebrated SAMUEL JOHNSON, the extraordinary power and precision of his conversation, and the pride arising from finding myself admitted as his companion, produced a variety of sensations and a pleasing elevation of mind beyond what I had ever before experienced."

It was on another occasion, at this same low-browed tavern, that Johnson made that dreadful remark to a Scotchman, who spoke of the prospect round Edinburgh, that has ever since been cruelly used as a universally known great British joke: "I believe, sir," said the tremendous man, whose voice was like a cathedral bell—"I believe, sir" (repeated for dignity and not from hesitation), "you have a great many trees—so has Norway, so has England—but, sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England."

And now we are inside the Mitre, it is not so long across the road, defying and dodging the cab, to that red, lighthouse sort of lamp that points us up Wine-office-court, where Goldsmith lived when he wrote children's books (as it is supposed), and certainly a grammar for Newberry the bookseller in St. Paul's-churchyard, and where Dr. Percy, who used to quarrel with Dr. Johnson about the old ballads he so usefully collected. Here, on the right hand, following a tract of sawdust that looks like powdered ginger, you will find the Cheshire Cheese Tavern, where in a certain window, snug on the right, they still point out (as they do at the Mitre) Johnson's seat, and, in this instance, Goldsmith's too.

Another of Johnson's clubs was at the Queen's Arms, in St. Paul's-churchyard, which the doctor had got a friend to form as a City Club, of quiet, well-behaved men: not *patriots*. He dined there, the very day his old friend Thrale, the brewer, died; for, from sorrow and self-torture, this hypochondriacal wise man always resorted to company, and not to solitude; which he dreaded as much as he did death.

Many as are the London doors we have knocked at following the ghost of Johnson, we still have not recorded all the places in which he twitched, and shouted, and extinguished, and felled conversational adversaries, from the time when he and Garrick set their faces towards London, until the day when their coffins were laid together in the south transept of Westminster Abbey, near Shakspeare's monument.

He had lived in Woodstock-street, Hanover-square, far away from printers and taverns; in the Strand, at the Black Boy, opposite the Adelphi; in Fetter-lane, that grimy defile; at

the Golden Anchor, Holborn-bars; at Staple Inn; at Gray's Inn; and at number seven, Johnson's-court. In this last place, which did not derive its name from him, lived the doctor, with blind Miss Williams on the ground-floor, Mr. Levett, his pensioner, in the garret, and below him Johnson's study, and untidy, ill-bound, but well read, folios. Here, he read, and wrote, and planned with more light and air than previously in the Temple. Here, often paced up Boswell, his staring eyebrows arched, his mouth protruding, his double chin swaying. Here, when one dismal Friday in March, 1776, he hastened, the day after his arrival in London, to attend his monarch's levees, and found Johnson still in his favourite Fleet-street, but removed to Bolt-court, he wrote down that night solemnly in his journal: "I felt a foolish regret that he had left a court which bore his name; but it was not foolish to be affected with some tenderness of regard for a place in which I had seen him a great deal, from whence I had often issued a better and happier man than when I entered, and which had often appeared to my imagination, while I trod its pavement in the solemn darkness of the night, to be sacred to wisdom and piety." Verily, there was some glimmer of true loyalty to this intellectual monarch, in this strange man.

Often, indeed, by day and night, I fancy I see in the distance that burly and sturdy ghost. In Covent-garden, where on one occasion he strolled with some rakes, who had knocked him up in the Temple for a morning frolic, and astonished the nurserymen by helping them to unpack their cabbages; in Leicester-square, where he used to visit Reynolds; in Clerkenwell, where he went to see the editor of the Gentleman's Magazine, at St. John's Gateway; in Salisbury-square, where he used to visit Richardson the printer and novelist, and where Hogarth, hearing him denounce the cruelty with which the Jacobites were treated, and judging from his rolling eyes and frothing mouth, took him for a madman.

There is no name, indeed, more deeply associated with the streets of London than that of Dr. Samuel Johnson, who has been wandering to-night, like a tax-collector's ghost going the rounds.

"What are those white streaks over the black chimney-pots of Chancery-lane?"

It is daybreak.